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SUBJECT: GAMBIAN FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS TALK BUSINESS

¶1. On February 6, Econoff and Econ Assistant hosted a working luncheon for a select group of Gambian businesswomen to initiate discussions on ways to expand their businesses and increase trade between The Gambia and the United States. The lunch was attended by nearly 20 women representing the Department of State for Trade, Industry and Employment, the Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and various private enterprises and financial institutions.

¶2. The attendees viewed segments of the "Africa, Open for Business" film which highlights successful and imaginative business endeavors in Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal. Econoff introduced the film as a demonstration for women entrepreneurs in The Gambia of how their colleagues in other African countries were dealing with common obstacles, such as difficulties in securing mortgages and loans and high transportation costs. Attendees remarked that they found the film inspirational and felt that it resonated with their personal experiences in conducting their businesses.

¶3. Emboffs also briefed the women on the status of The Gambia's application for an AGOA Textile Visa which would enable the country to export textiles and garments to the U.S. duty free and quota free. They also urged Gambian entrepreneurs seeking to attend trade shows in the U.S. to plan ahead to avoid last minute difficulties.

¶4. The women entrepreneurs had a very lively discussion which covered several areas, such as the importance of specialized training for tailors to meet the high standards demanded by the international clothing market. They also urged Gambian businesswomen to share their knowledge and experiences with each other and emphasized the importance of marketing and promotion of their various businesses.

¶5. The Deputy Permanent Secretary at the Department of State for Trade, Industry and Employment, Mrs. Naffie Barry, thanked the U.S. Embassy for sponsoring the event and said as the principal Gambian government department responsible for private sector development, her department is interested in cooperating with any agency providing assistance to the private sector, particularly women in business.

¶6. Econoff was approached by a representative of the largest bank in The Gambia with an offer to co-sponsor these kinds of events with the Embassy in the future. Other women inquired about the DVD and were told how to order copies for themselves. Following the lunch, Embassy issued a press release which was published in two local independent journals, "The Point" and "Foroyaa," on February 9.

¶7. The press articles drew the attention of the country's third ranking official, National Assembly Speaker Fatoumatta Jahumpha Ceasay, and of the UN Resident Representative, Fadzai Gwaradzimba, both strong women's empowerment advocates. In a meeting with the Ambassador, the Speaker made a point of expressing appreciation for the Embassy's initiative in hosting this event. The UN Resident Rep has inquired about the event in the context of similar events she is considering for the future.

18. At the behest of several of the women, Post plans to work with WATH to organize a training session for garment workers in The Gambia to familiarize them with international standards for clothing production.

STAFFORD